AM I HAVING FUN YET?

Part I - THE BIG QUESTION

Loop Group Breakfast

April 12, 1988

Chicago Bar Association, 7:00 a.m.

Get Acquainted Exercise - small group 4/5

1. Name
2. Where you live - how long and where you come from
3. Where you work
4. What you like to do when you are not working
5. You have $200 and a free day - how would you use it? - you can do anything except bring the money home with you.

Introduction - To set the scene for ~~next 3~~

4 Part Inquiry

1

Am I having fun yet?

Next week Elmer Hite - introduce her - AMOCO - Professional Happiness

Two weeks Allan Cox - Executive Search Personal Happiness

Final - Spiritual Happiness

More analysis than AM- look at it from sexual perspectives —

There is more than a little irony, I suppose, in the fact that 100% of us are willing to get up early, make our way down here, shell out $30.00 - to hear some people address the curious question "Am I Having Fun Yet?" After all you/we are supposed to be the experts on the topic.

Yet in this poignant way the question is asked - and in the way it has become almost a cliche which we find ourselves using when the going is tough, demanding, - ~~clearly not fun, at least in any recognizable form,~~ probably reveals the fact that we really don't know much more about it than those who have gone before us. (The difference is that we have become convinced that fun is part of what the program promises for us: that's both good and bad, but we'll return to it later).

ie. Am I having fun yet - ?

In any event - I keep two incidents in my memory bank -

physical fitness

One - in a calisthenics class - the ~~the~~ particular exercise was sitting with arms crossed

and feet 12 inches off the floor for 60 seconds - 60 seconds - eternity: and invariably the leathery old physical director of the Y - my friend Bill Smith - as we were gasping, writhing in pain, finally giving in and dropping our feet - would say - "Time Sure Flies When You're Having Fun."

Second incident - sailing - my friend, former submariner - with pretty good water and underwater skills - had been telling me about harvesting snails and then having escargot - on board. Someone had told him about it - and he talked about it a lot, a kind of obsession.

The day came - we were moored at the island where there was a kind of rough outcrop of rock on the shore - where the snails were - right at the water line, where the waves hit -

calm day - piece of cake

rough day - challenge

It was rough - three of us in a dinghy - close as possible - one went around and on top with bucket on rope - to hang down and receive snails -

Dick & I put on masks, flippers, swam in and went to work -

Sea pretty active - up and down, and every time you grabbed a snail, a breaker would hit - with pretty frightening impact.

As we struggled it occurred to me to yell at him over the thunder of the water - "Dick - are we having fun yet?"

The snails were awful: we learned you must boil them in sea water - and we didn't... so they tasted vaguely like tire innertubes.

But - you know, he and I have probably laughed more about it and told that story more to each other than any other and I suppose it really was fun - if one of the definitions of fun is that the event has lasting value to you and you tell stories about it afterward...

Actually - Am I Having Fun is a variation of one of the most important, if not most important - in human history, namely what is happiness?

contentment - fulfillment

2nd you can continue to enjoy it -

fulfillment

or deeper still, what is the purpose of all life and my life - what is its meaning?

What should I do to discover, alleviate, implement purpose and meaning... What will make me smile at the end of the day and the end of the road?

No one question has so dominated philosophy. In a sense it is what the human quest is about. Related to it - is - "Who gets to answer."

Is it an objective verity that the very wise get to define for the rest of us...?

Are the experts - Plato's philosopher Kings - the faculty of the University of Chicago?

Or how about the church?

Does Cardinal Bernadin - Moody Bible Institute or Fourth Presbyterian Church get to define fun? (If so, go with the Presbyterians - trust me!)

Or your family - your parents, whose own working definitions are very much a part of your

psyche - either as a reflection - or a reaction against?

Or the culture - the broad blanket of values and hopes and behavior models which constitute the environment in which we live? That, of course, has always been the major definer - the culture - and that, at least for people who see themselves as Christians, has always presented a bit of a problem.

In any event, it was a revelation to me - in the late 60s - to discover that one of the places where the question is raised - (What is Fun - etc.) and the culture definition criticized of is in film.

In fact, I can to remember the film - The Graduate - Dustin Hoffman - and Anne Bancroft, Mrs. Robinson seduces Benji - after a party celebrating his graduation from college and that was pretty interesting. But what that film really did was challenge - not very subtly - the going definition of happiness - i.e. home in suburbs -

country club - 2.5 children, station wagon, cocktail parties and barbecues. Of course, 60s college people were way out in front - but here was a popular movie, enormously successful - which succeeded in getting people to laugh and see the epitome of the life style and the institutions which were defining happiness.

Two scenes in particular -

At a party, Benjamin is circulating, trying to avoid the relentless question - "What next? What are you going to do?" One bleary old family friend, takes him by the arm - leads him over to a corner and says cryptically - "One word, Benji - just one word." Hoffman, at his best, looks eager, wide eyed - "Yes," he says, "Yes," and the man whispers it in his ear, loudly - "Plastics - plastics. Get into plastics."

Then at the end Hoffman rescues his love from a very proper church wedding - literally whisks her away down the aisle and locks the stunned congregation in the church by jamming the altar

cross in the front door and they drive away, up the California coast, while Simon and Garfunkle sing Scarborough Fair.

Now - that was heavy handed and my guess is that the people who drove up the coast whistling Simon and Garfunkle weren't any happier than the ones who slugged it out in suburbia -

But the question was out - asked - popularly and publically -

And Hollywood has been asking it ever since (at its best and at its worst shamelessly exploiting our thirst for answers).

English film director Blake Edwards both exploited the issue in "10, but also seriously asked the question of whether happiness was really the simple pursuit of pleasure. Dudley Moore is a 42 year old who makes an utter fool of himself pursuing Bo Derek and it is ultimately a very poignant and sad movie (particularly for those over 42).

Two years ago About Last Night took up the

question again, this time from the angle of commitment, or the lack of it. That movie is about people who work awfully hard at having fun - but aren't very happy. Next Network News - what a good - but peculiar movie that was: three different, interesting characters, all living life in the fast lane, pursuing careers with single-minded devotion and missing something.

Wall Street - a virtual exegesis of the Bible verse - "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul."

And the best and most difficult, Milan Kundera's -- The Unbearable Lightness of Being - Czechoslovakia 1968, the Czech spring - Surgeon Tomas, womanizer, Tereza - his lover, then wife, photographer, - who is faithful to him and to herself, or at least she tries to be. But when she bravely photographs the Russian tanks crushing the fragile emergence of human rights in Prague and the photos are secreted out and published - actually contributes to the jailing of Czech people.

Because the Russians use her photos to identify people in the street demonstrations.

Tomas in expelled from medicine -- for political reasons, becomes a window washer - still a notorious womanizer. They end up on a small farm in the countryside. On the day before they die in a truck accident, Tereza sees Tomas struggle to change a tire on the pick-up truck. She is filled with guilt... She is responsible she thinks for his humiliation.

That night she says, "You've lost everything."

He says, "Haven't you noticed I've been happy here?"

"Surgery was your mission" Tereza says.

Tomas answers "Missions are stupid, Tereza. I have no mission. No one has. And it's a terrific relief to realize you're free, free of all missions."

It is an enigmatic ending and I've been thinking about it ever since. I don't think I

believe it.

Now - we are here this morning, I think, because we ask the question of human happiness from a very particular context.

Someone changed the rules in the past 30 years. It probably had something to do with President Eisenhower's decision to pick up the pieces of the French debacle in Southeast Asia by sending a few advisers into South Vietnam. But, for sure, everyone who came of age before 1960 is operating by a different set of rules from those who came after. I'm in the before group - 1959 - Graduation and marriage. That fact alone tells you something.

Before 1960 - in the old world - happiness, if it was relevant at all - was defined as "duty."

Duty to family, community, nation. Reading the Times Sunday, I bumped into an article on the Battlefield at Antietam, in Travel... Bloodiest battle in all of American military history... 23,000 casualties - in one day - more than any day

in World War I and II, Korea and Vietnam. One of the last great battles, when men, using old rules of warfare, simply marched or charged, rank upon rank - into the withering cannon and rifle fire of the enemy until they either ran out of ammunition or ~~numbness~~ their numbers overcame ~~their~~ the other side's ability to reload. It was that simple and 23,000 men fell. And the Times asked "Why did they do that? Why didn't they just turn around and walk away?" A monument at the battlefield says - "Not for self, but for country."

I spent part of last weekend with Ted Panopolos, an old high-school friend of Sue's brother. We told Altoona stories. Ted's dad came from Greece - to join relatives in Altoona. He came with nothing. He worked two and three jobs, finally put together enough capital to buy a small rooming house. Built it up, worked at it twenty hours a day, seven days a week for forty years, bought a home - educated his sons, married off his daughters in elaborate Greek Orthodox weddings and then died of a heart attack. He probably thought he was happy... He probably was - Happiness was doing your duty...

Another movie scene sticks in my mind. I've even forgotten the name. This family is Italian. They are at a family wedding. A son chooses the occasion to take his father aside and tell him he's getting a divorce. The old man is horrified, tries to talk the son out of it.

"I'm not happy Papa."

"Are you happy - you and Mama?"

"What's happiness? What's that got to do with it? We're married."

So for a very long time happiness, if it was relevant at all, was a product of duty... of doing what you were supposed to do... of meeting expectations of parents, church, nation and culture.

That needed correcting. After operating under those rules for decades (is it helpful here to recall that duty - happiness is not ancient, but a pretty American product).

Western human beings were ready for change, for an expansion of the vistas - for a giant step

forward. The system needed correcting - a revolution was inevitable. (Remember 50 year olds are right on the border - looking forward and backward - something you can't do without clarity of vision).

So a revolution came and while it didn't replace the government - it surely replaced the governing values and governing definitions of happiness.

The elements of this revolution which was picking up some steam in the late 50s and early 60s included:

1) Incredible new mobility. People starting moving and the extended family, that matrix of relationships which gave us identity and values - weakened and for many people disappeared. I grew up with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins - all around. My guess is that most of you didn't.

2) Affluence - until the 60's, with exception of the very wealthy, most people spent most of their time trying to feed themselves.

With affluence came cars and television and technology and new values.

3) Education for all - after World War II, at government expense.

4) Women's liberation.

5) Breakdown of confidence in institutions - which, all agree, is at the heart of our value crisis.

People over fifty have a very hard time believing their government would lie to them and if it did it was surely in national interests. People under fifty have gotten accustomed to it. With the peculiar anomaly that officials who have lied to us, to congress, to courts, to investigators, are still running the show.

People, post 60s, lost confidence in church, government, schools, teachers and scoutmasters.

So a great cultural revolution came, and as often happens, it missed the mark - or came up short.

For one thing, duty was replaced by pursuit

of one's personal agenda. I clipped an article once, entitled "Confession of a Middle-Aged, Middle-Class, White, Liberal, Protestant Parent." She wrote - "My children never had to worry about anyone other than themselves and voila! - they don't." She quoted a psychiatrist friend talking about a young client. "This kid is hooked. He's addicted to doing what he wants to do."

So - broadly - gratification replaced discipline. The old way was pretty oppressive - but the new one turned out not to be much better.

Now - we should have known that. We ought to have known that a definition of happiness based on doing what one wants to do when one wants to do it, free from all restraints - is not going to show us at our best, or make us happy.

Rats who are wired to a machine and who when they hit the button - experience orgasm - will do nothing else, will not eat or drink, will hit the button 50,000 times a day till they drop dead.

In the 9th grade I participated in a very

sophisticated experiment. Three rats - one was fed lettuce, one Hershey's Chocolate Bars, one had a choice. The one who ate lettuce looked pretty good. The chocolate eater - looked awful after a while: and guess what choice the one made who had a choice. Big deal.

There is something less than fullness of humanity in doing what you want to do -

making self - the arbiter.

Besides, it doesn't work -

~~cite Habits of the Heart~~ -

~~de Tocque—lle discovered~~ it -

~~Christopher Lasc~~l -